



NICK CARTER WEEKLY

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"NICK CARTER," HISSED DURK, "YOU DIE AT NOON, AND I HOPE YOU'LL SUFFER A THOUSAND DEATHS FROM THIRST BEFORE THAT FATAL HOUR ARRIVES."—(CHAPTER CLV.)

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NICK CARTER'S ADVENTURES.

By the author of "NICHOLAS CARTER."

CHAPTER CXLVIII.

A FACE FROM THE GRAVE.

A long passenger express train was making the last lap of its journey from the West to New York.

It had left Philadelphia about three hours after midnight, and was now more than half way across New Jersey.

The night was at its darkest, for it was late in the autumn, and the sun was not due to rise for more than two hours.

Nick Carter, who had made a flying visit to Philadelphia, leaving New York on the previous evening, had boarded the train at that city and taken a berth in a sleeper.

He had fallen asleep at once. Nick could keep awake longer at a stretch than any other man living, but when he had a chance to rest, he lost no time in going to sleep.

How long he had been unconscious he could not tell, but it seemed to him only a second after he closed his eyes that he was aroused by a terrific shock.

He was quivering in every limb, and his feet were numb.

At first he thought they had been driven clear through the partition at the end of his berth.

This fact told him immediately what had happened; that is, that the train had come to a sudden stop.

The force of the train's previous motion had carried his body ahead as far as it could go, which was only a few inches, and his feet had jammed with great violence against the partition.

But there was more than that to inform him of the situation.

The car was shaking, there was the sound of breaking and creaking woodwork, and the grinding of iron as the body of the car was wrenched from the trucks.

"A head on collision!" said Nick, sitting up.

He hurriedly put on trousers and shoes, and he had hardly got thus far in his dressing, when he was pitched from the berth into the aisle.

The train had stopped, so far as its forward mo-

tion was concerned, but there had been a constant shaking during the few seconds since the shock, and at last the car tipped over almost upon its side.

By this time there were screams and cries from the passengers, and groans from those who were already suffering pain from injuries.

The lights in the car had gone out.

Nick could see nothing, and reaching out his hands, he found that berths on the opposite side, and against which he had been thrown, were empty.

Near by he heard a man struggling to get out, but he seemed to be able to help himself.

Others a little further along were evidently in confusion.

All were trying to crawl to the door, and the passage was badly blocked.

"Come this way, everybody," called Nick, realizing instantly that the narrow passage around the washroom would be hopeless as a way of getting out, now that the car was on its side.

He climbed back into his berth and opened the window.

Somebody, who had taken courage at his call, was close behind him.

"Think we can get out of the window, mister?" asked a voice.

"Yes," Nick answered, "up with you. I'll help."

The man scrambled up and crawled out.

Before he dropped from the side of the car, he turned around and reached his hand to Nick.

"Come on," he said, "my turn to help now."

"No," replied Nick, "I'll stay here till all are out. You might stay where you are, if you see any difficulty in getting the women to the ground."

"There's quite a drop," was the response.

"Then stay there."

He heard a woman's voice behind him.

"Are you hurt, madam?" he asked.

At the same time he found her arm in the darkness, and held it to steady her.

"I don't know," she stammered, "I am so dreadfully frightened."

"Guess you're all right," said he, cheerfully.

"Brace yourself against me and climb through the window. There's another man outside who will help you down."

The detective himself braced his body slantwise across his berth so that his knees became steps.

The woman had just begun to climb up to the window when a man tried to crowd past.

Just enough starlight came from the window to enable Nick to see his form.

"No, you don't!" cried the detective, sternly, grabbing the man by the collar and yanking him back. "Women first, you coward!"

"Get out of my way!" retorted the unseen man, harshly.

He tried to shake off the detective's grip, but even though he used both hands, he could not do so.

Then he drew away suddenly, and Nick, who was trying to steady the woman with his other hand, let go.

Immediately the man seized the woman and pulled her back.

She screamed with terror.

Nick was boiling with anger and contempt.

He would have struck at the man in the darkness, but that he feared to hit the woman, who was partly between them.

"Be calm, madam," he said, getting to his feet, so that he could work more freely.

"Oh!" she answered, "let him out first, if he wants to go."

It occurred to Nick that perhaps some time might be saved by letting the cowardly fellow crawl out ahead of the others, but he did not believe that there was great danger in a few second's delay, and he was too indignant to give the cur any advantage.

"Not much!" he answered, and by that time he had felt of them in the darkness and knew where he could strike.

The man had started past the woman, and was on the point of grasping the window ledge.

Nick put his left arm around her so as to hold her out of the way, and reached after the man

He caught him by the waistband, and with one jerk brought him tumbling back.

Then the detective smashed him one on the head that dropped him against the lower berth.

"Now, then, madam," said Nick, as calmly as if they were at a picnic, "up you go."

He lifted her to the window.

The man outside reached down and pulled, and in a second she was out of the car.

"Curse you!" howled the man who had been hit; "do you mean to stand between a man and his only chance of life?"

"Yes, when you're the man," retorted Nick, "but I was under the impression that you were a hog."

The man had got to his feet and was again trying to reach up to the window.

"See here," added Nick, taking him by the shoulders and forcing him back, "I'll make a footstool of you if you don't keep quiet."

"Let me out!" roared the other, struggling.

"When everybody is out except me," replied Nick. "Then I'll let you go. Not before."

Another man had crawled to the spot.

Nick held the "hog" firmly.

"My wife is here," the newcomer began.

"Lift her to the window," interrupted Nick. "You'll find help outside."

The newcomer tried to follow directions, but he was either too nervous or not strong enough.

Nick, seeing that his help was needed, picked up the "hog," who was still struggling, and staggered with him along the berths on the lower side of the car for a distance of six feet.

Then he threw him down.

"Lie there!" he cried, "until I call for you!"

The fellow gasped and grunted as he went down, but for a minute or so he kept quiet.

Quickly Nick returned to the window, and his powerful arms were busy lifting men and women up until all were safely out.

"Any more?" called the man who had climbed out first.

"One," replied Nick, shortly, "unless somebody

has been stunned by the shock. I'll get this fellow out and then make a search."

He was about to call for the "hog," when he heard the man breathing hard beside him.

"I'll get even with you for this!" muttered the man, making another attempt to climb to the window.

This time Nick did not interfere with him.

"All right," he responded, quietly, "send in your bill."

In the darkness the man appeared to be a thick-set, heavy fellow, and he was apparently too frightened to make good use of his hands and legs.

He stumbled back at his first try and groaned with terror.

"Suppose the car should get on fire!" he gasped.

"Then we should have a fine lot of roast pork!" exclaimed Nick. "Here, step on my hands."

He got his hands under the man's foot and lifted.

The man outside reached down as before, and presently the "hog" was safely out.

As he passed through the window, Nick got a glimpse of his head.

The face was not to be seen at all, and little more than the back of the head.

Nick saw that the man was very bald, there being little more than a fringe of hair behind the ears.

Even at that moment there seemed to be something familiar in the shape of that head, but the detective heard a low cry back in the car and forgot the bald-headed coward at once.

He stumbled back through the car, calling and feeling for the person whose voice he had heard.

At length he found a woman near the end.

The car was totally wrecked there, and the woman was held fast by broken timbers and berth partitions.

"Patience, madam," said Nick. "I think we shall get you out of this."

She groaned, and he could hear her making an effort to rise.

"Lie still, please," he added.

There was a box of matches in his trousers pocket, and Nick struck a light.

It took no more than a glance to assure him that the woman could not be rescued from within the car.

There was such a tangle of beams over her that she was certain to be crushed if he should succeed in pulling them aside.

Moreover, it looked as though even his enormous strength would not be equal to the task.

"Madam," he said, gently, "you will have to lie where you are for a few minutes. I will go out and break in above you. I think there will be no danger—"

"I heard somebody speak of fire," she interrupted, faintly.

"That was a fool who was too scared to know what he was about," Nick answered. "The car is not on fire, and there is probably no danger of that kind. Be patient. I shall lose no time."

He was already crawling back to his window.

The man who had gone out first was still there to help him, but Nick needed no help.

"All out now?" asked the man.

Nick explained the situation briefly.

"We shall have to have axes," he added, "and there are usually a couple fastened to the washroom wall. I'll go there and get them before coming out."

Nick did this, finding the axes without difficulty, and a moment later he crawled out with them.

Then he and the man who had stood by to help, went to the other end of the car and began to clear away the wreckage.

It had been a fearful smashup. It needed no light to show that, but as a matter of fact, there was now light enough, for one of the wrecked cars had caught fire, and it was blazing furiously.

As he worked, Nick glanced anxiously around.

He saw half-dressed men and women in a crowd a few rods from the track.

Nearer were train hands and passengers like himself and his companions, who were doing their best to rescue those who were still held prisoners by the wreckage.

"I guess," he remarked, "that if fifty more men

went to work nothing more could be done than is being done now."

"That's right," said the other, "though I hate to see men standing around idle at such a time. Anyhow, you and I have got our work cut out for us here."

"Yes. We mustn't leave this spot until we get that woman out. This car might catch fire from the sparks."

A moment later both dropped their axes to lift away a beam.

While they were at this, Nick saw a bald-headed man watching him.

He appeared to be fully dressed, except for his hat and collar, and by the shape of his head Nick knew him for the "hog."

But, all of a sudden, Nick seemed to know him for somebody else.

He had seen that brutish face before.

Where?

Small need for Nick, with his wonderful memory, to ask that question. He remembered—

But that man was dead!

It was a puzzling moment, and a strange feeling came over the detective as he lifted, with his companion, at the beam.

He remembered a case he had worked on in Mount Vernon.

A rich man was being slowly poisoned by his doctor.

Nick had taken a position in the house as nurse.

The horrible plot was coming to an end when the house was set on fire.

Nick had rescued the rich man's daughter from an unseen man who had tried to kill her in the darkness.

He had left that man, the would-be murderer, bound securely while he hastened to the rich man's room to save him from the villainous doctor.

The detective had come just in time, but while he was saving the rich man, the doctor had ran out, and it was supposed that he had escaped.

Then, when the house had been burned to the

ground, and an investigation of the ashes was made, the body of the doctor had been found on the spot where Nick had left the would-be murderer.

The doctor evidently had tried to help his accomplice to escape, and the accomplice had repaid him by stabbing him to the heart and leaving his body to be burned.

All that had been perfectly clear at the time, for the fire had not destroyed the doctor's body beyond recognition.

The doctor's name was Durk.

And the face of this "hog" who had fought with a woman for a chance to escape from the car, and whom Nick had finally helped out, was the face of Dr. Durk!

CHAPTER CXLIX.

ATTEMPTED MURDER.

Nick dropped his eyes the instant he saw that the man was looking at him; for in that instant he remembered all these things and saw the astonishing resemblance.

Resemblance?

It was more than that!

The detective believed that he had looked upon Dr. Durk himself.

He thought of other things as he lifted at the beam.

At the time of the incident in Mount Vernon referred to, he had become convinced that the murderer of Dr. Durk was at the head of a band of criminals.

For weeks he had been pursuing that band.

Not once had he come in sight of the leader.

He had reason to believe that the gang had been broken up through his efforts.

Many men had been captured, and were now waiting trial.

Even now Patsy was at work on a clew that promised to lead the detectives to the leader of the gang.

Nick expected to get a report from Patsy on the matter when he got home.

Could it be possible that Dr. Durk had been the murderer and not the victim?

Was the clever, wonderfully shrewd leader of the gang none other than Dr. Durk himself?

It did not seem possible, for not only had the doctor's dead body been identified beyond doubt, but when he was alive the doctor had shown himself to be a drunken, weak-minded villain.

He was villainous enough for any crime, but it was plain that he had been working under the direction of a master whom he feared and respected.

It could not be possible that the man who had directed all the bold operations of the gang had been the rum-soaked man who had escaped from Nick's clutches at the time the house in Mount Vernon burned down.

And yet, there was that face, and as Nick thought of it, he seemed to remember the voice also.

Again, nothing could be plainer than that the man recognized him.

The would-be murderer had not seen the detective, for they had their struggle in total darkness.

Dr. Durk had seen him often, and at this moment there was in his eyes a clear indication that he knew who the detective was.

Nick and his companion lifted away the beam, and immediately set to work with their axes again to clear away more wreckage.

They could hear the woman speaking to them.

"Oh, hurry! I am in such pain!"

And the fire from the burning car near by was creeping toward them.

There could be no stopping the work of rescue for the sake of studying the strange problem that had arisen before Nick like a ghost from the grave.

As for Durk, for, as the detective called him thus in his thoughts, we will call him Durk also, he turned his head the moment Nick looked at him and hastened away.

The next time Nick had a chance to look around, Durk was not to be seen.

Some other passengers who had not been injured, seeing the two men at work, came up and offered to

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help, but it was as Nick had said; there was not room for more than two to do anything at this spot.

The fire gained on them rapidly, and the time came when the wind drove the flames into their very faces.

Nick's companion darted back once with a cry, but he returned immediately.

"I thought my eyes were going to be burned out that time," he said, "but I guess I didn't lose more than an eyebrow."

"Now, then," Nick responded, dropping his ax, "you take care of the woman."

"Eh? What—"

The question was not finished, for the detective had grasped a part of the wreckage and lifted it.

Men who were looking on cried out with amazement, for it would not have been supposed that two giants could have lifted and held such a mass of wood and iron.

Nick's companion said nothing.

He was, like the detective, a man of action and courage.

Stooping beneath the mass that Nick held, he dragged the woman out and carried her away.

Naturally, all those who were looking on followed the man with the woman as soon as they saw Nick let go the wreckage.

At that moment the conductor of the train hurried by.

"Good!" he cried; "everybody is out of danger now."

He did not stop for anything further, but went on to the end of the train.

Nick was stooping to pick up the axes, for he thought, before he heard the conductor speak, that there might be further use for them.

As he stood up he caught a glimpse of a man who had climbed upon the wreckage just in front of him.

This man was aiming a blow at him with an ax!

Quick as a flash Nick raised one of the axes he had in his hands.

There was a sharp tang as the blades of the axes came together.

The fellow let go his ax and leaped from the wreckage upon the further side.

Nick stepped back to avoid the falling ax.

Then, two strides for a start, he vaulted upon the overturned car.

By the light of the fire he saw the man who had tried to kill him running across a field.

Already he was little more than a shadow in the darkness, but Nick saw and jumped.

He landed on his feet and started on the run at once.

A good deal of noise was made by the roaring of the flames upon the wreckage.

More noise was made by the escaping steam from the engine, that was lying buried under broken freight cars, for the passenger had run into a freight that had been stopped on the main track.

Something had gone wrong with the signals, but that was a matter that Nick cared nothing about at the time, and he never investigated it.

He had not run a hundred yards before he distinguished above the noises arising from the wreck, the faint but sharp crack of a revolver.

Next instant there was a hiss close to his cheek, and the bullet sped harmlessly past.

At the same moment, being now somewhat distant from the fire, Nick lost sight of the man he was chasing.

He dropped full length upon the ground, after staggering a few feet, as if he had been hit.

Ah! how he wished that he had his revolver with him!

That was with his coat, vest and hat in the wrecked car, and with them were nearly all the articles he usually carried with him for meeting just such cases as this.

He had been thinking of going back after them when he had rescued the woman with the assistance of the good-hearted stranger.

This was the way Nick sized up the situation:

The man who had swung the ax at him was not Durk.

He had seen the fellow's face plainly, and it was wholly new to him.

He concluded, therefore, that this was one of Durk's men.

There might be others on the train, but that there was at least one man left of the gang besides the leader he was sure; for at one time not long before Patsy had talked with the leader over a telephone.

The young detective had represented himself as a thief, and on that occasion he had heard not only the voice of the leader, but that of another man who had not been captured.

This might be that other man, or it might be a new recruit to Durk's force of crooks.

The important point was, as Nick saw it, that Durk, having recognized him, must have ordered his assistant to kill the detective.

Watching the matter from some point where the shadows of the wreck concealed him, Durk must have seen that the detective had escaped the deadly blow.

Then, when the detective set out in pursuit, Durk had shot at him, believing that the noise of the wreck would drown the report of his revolver.

Nick had a double reason in falling as he did.

For one thing, he believed that the man he was pursuing was armed also, for he was fully dressed.

That man, knowing that Durk would shoot, might have stepped behind a tree, or stooped beside a wall, meaning to let the detective come close for a sure shot, if Durk's should miss.

Another thing was this: If he pretended to be hit, Durk might come from the wreck to see if he were dead, and to finish him if it should prove that the detective was merely wounded.

Now Nick Carter's business was a dangerous one. He was frequently in peril of his life, and he was forever taking chances from which other men would have shrunk without feeling that they were cowards; but Nick was no fool, and he would not deliberately walk into a trap that his enemies had set for him.

Unarmed as he was, he had to depend on his wits in the struggle with these desperate men.

That they were unusually desperate was shown by the fact that the attempt with the ax had been made where it was possible for dozens of persons to see it.

The criminal probably counted on the fact that everybody's attention was taken up with the accident.

Then, the shooting had been done where many witnesses might have seen and heard, although, so far as Nick could see, none of the passengers or trainmen were on this side of the wreck.

As soon as he had fallen, he rolled over and over on the ground, confident that in the darkness Durk could not see that he was still in motion.

He came in this way to a tree, behind which he crawled, and he lay in such a position that he could look, not only toward the wrecked train, but in the direction taken by the man he had started to chase.

For a full minute he looked in vain. No one stirred near the train.

"I might have known," he said to himself; "the rascal is too shrewd to put his foot in it by following up his shot. He's no ordinary crook, as I've had reason for finding out before this."

"He looks at it this way: If I'm dead, that settles it; if I'm not, I'm very likely to down him if he gets close enough."

"That is the way I should look at it if I was in his place, and I've got to reckon that he is as sharp as I am."

It was a different matter with the other man, and Nick gave most of his attention to looking southward, which was the direction the man had taken.

He began to think that the fellow had not halted as he supposed, when he saw a movement from a stone wall not far away.

It was either an animal, or a man creeping on all fours.

Nick felt around on the ground and presently found a stone about half as large as his fist.

He picked it up and got a little further behind the tree, for he did not want the man, if man it was, to see him when he stood up.

Cautiously he got to his feet.

It was a long throw, but in daylight and with a still target the detective would have been sure of it.

He gave one backward glance toward the train.

The glare of the fire now lighted the ground clearly in that direction, and if anything had been moving there he could have seen it.

No treacherous shot was to be feared from that quarter, and he stood up suddenly.

Stepping from behind the tree, he hurled the stone with all his might.

It is not likely that the creeping figure saw him rise, but it happened that just as Nick threw, the figure straightened up and began to run.

The stone, nevertheless, found its mark, as Nick knew by the howl of pain that came from the fugitive.

But the trouble was that the stone did not hit the man's head, or any other place where the blow could disable him.

He could run as well as before, and now fear seemed to give him greater speed.

Nick began the chase again.

He did not try to overtake the fugitive, preferring to keep him in sight until the fellow should be winded.

Then it would be a comparatively simple matter to overhaul and capture him.

So, for about half-a-mile Nick ran on across the fields, and never lost sight of the man.

It was now so near dawn that the air was getting light enough to distinguish the running object without difficulty.

The fugitive did not show any signs of wearing out, but Nick saw reason enough for hurrying.

They were approaching another railroad.

The eastern part of New Jersey is crisscrossed with many lines, and they often run close beside each other for miles.

A freight train bound for New York, was coming up the road.

The train was long, and there was a grade at that point, so that its speed was not great as compared to that of a passenger train, or a freight going on the level.

Nick saw a chance for the fugitive, and the latter saw it, too.

He ran with greater effort, came to the tracks just as the last of the train was passing, ran alongside, caught the hand rail of a box car and swung himself up.

For a moment it looked as if he would slip, but after hanging on and kicking wildly, he got his foot on the iron crook that serves as a step, and then worked his way in between the cars.

The detective could not have got aboard the train if he had wanted to.

The last car was far past when he came to the tracks.

"Lucky fellow!" was all he thought about it.

He turned about at once and started back to the wrecked train.

One of his men had got away, but he was on a train bound for the city, and there was a chance of catching him by telegraph if a station could be found soon enough.

If not, there would be a chance to catch him in the city during the day.

Meantime, there was Durk, the chief villain of the whole lot, still within possible reach.

"He may have skipped," thought Nick. "I would if I was in his place, but we'll see."

CHAPTER CL.

THE LEADER'S NAME.

When Nick got back to the wreck, he found that farmers living near had come to the scene in wagons, bringing clothes and bedding for the unfortunate passengers.

Some of the injured had already been taken on these rough ambulances to houses.

Others were waiting for the special train that would arrive soon from Jersey City.

A wrecking train had arrived already, and men were at work jacking up the cars that were not afire and clearing them from the tracks.

Most of those who were not injured had gone

down the track beyond the freight train to wait for the special.

Nick went there first and looked over the crowd. Durk was not among the passengers.

The detective then went back to the wreck, where a few men were making ready to carry the injured on stretchers made from car doors to the special train.

"Hello," said a familiar voice, "did you get left when they handed around the coats?"

The speaker was the passenger who had worked with Nick.

He had on a ragged old overcoat that was a mile or so too big for him.

"How's this for style?" he added, with a laugh.

"Well," said Nick, "I think it would attract attention on Fifth avenue."

"I should think it would! But, see here, my friend, you must be cold."

Nick looked down at himself.

"No," he responded, "I've been too busy to feel cold."

"I've been busy myself, but I was mighty glad to get this fine collection of rags, just the same. Come, let's see if we can find you a coat."

He took Nick by the arm, and the detective went with him willingly to a farmer's wagon.

A hayseed with a long, straggling beard stood beside it, with a bundle under his arm.

"By gosh!" he exclaimed, when Nick approached, "you're jest the feller I've been lookin' fer."

"Me?" said Nick; "what have you got against me?"

"A dum good coat and vest and a hat," replied the farmer, opening his bundle. "Take 'em, mister, they're your'n fer keeps."

"You are very kind, sir. Is this the way you've been treating all the passengers?"

"No, by cracky! it ain't. S'pose I run a clothing store? No, siree! I've give the rest of 'em all the togs I could rake and scrape outen my house, 'cept these. Them are fer you; do you understand? I've been a hangin' on to 'em much as an hour waitin' to sot eyes on ye."

"So? I'm obliged to you, sir, but I'm afraid I don't deserve so much——"

"By thunder! yes, you do. I see you lift a hull car all by yourself to get a woman out——".

"Oh, come now! not so much as that."

"Wall, it was putty nigh it. I had jest got to the smashup from my house down the road a piece, when I see you and this gentleman at work, and I was jest goin' to take a holt and help, when I see you lift, and I was so flabbergasted that I couldn't do no more'n gawp at ye. So, and I says to myself, says I: 'These poor critters 'll want bedding and clothes, and I'll get all we can spare, and the best we've got will be fer that wonderful man with the big muscle, by gum!' And there ye are."

Nick laughed as he put the things on. They fitted him fairly well and felt comfortable, for he was beginning to notice the chill of the morning.

"Give me your name," he said, "and I'll send you a vote of thanks when I get home."

The farmer gave his name and address, and two days later he was astonished to receive a check for one hundred dollars, signed by the name of a man of whom he had heard as the most famous detective in the world.

As they walked away from the wagon, Nick said to his companion:

"How is the woman we pulled from under the wreck?"

"The woman we pulled!" cried the other; "I like that! Why, if it hadn't been for you she would never have got out alive."

"Very well, considering, as the farmer would say. A doctor was among the passengers. He examined her and said no bones were broken. Of course she was bruised, but she felt so well that she insisted on trying to walk down the tracks to the special that will arrive soon."

"Did she succeed in walking?"

"No. She had to give that up, and some of us carried her, but she hasn't been seriously hurt."

"I'm glad to hear it."

"I knew you would be. What became of you after that?"

"I was busy with another passenger."

"So I supposed; and say, friend, I would like to know who you are. My name is Blake—John Blake, of Chicago. Sorry that I haven't a card——"

"It's the same with me, Mr. Blake," interrupted Nick. "My coat and grip must be burned up by this time, but I'm glad to know you and I'll tell you who I am in a minute. I want to ask a question first. Did you notice the last man we helped out of the car?"

"That bald-headed hog? You bet I did! He takes the cake for downright meanness."

"Then you knew that he tried to fight his way past a woman?"

"I judged something of the sort from what I heard, but that wasn't what I was thinking of at the moment!"

"No?"

"It was what he did afterward?"

"Oh! Then you saw him again?"

"Yes. It was some five or six minutes after we got the woman from under the wreck—by the way, did you hear anything that sounded like a pistol shot?"

"I did."

"I was sure of it. Most of them didn't seem to hear it. What do you suppose it was?"

"I suppose it was a pistol shot."

Mr. Blake looked at him queerly, and both smiled.

"I reckon you know something about that," said Blake.

"I reckon you're right," responded Nick. "Tell me about the hog. I'm interested."

"Well, as I said, five or six minutes after we got through our work, the farmers' wagons began to come up. It proved later that there were plenty of them, but at first there was only one. We didn't know whether there'd be any more or not, you know, and, of course, you can see how we needed that one wagon."

"Certainly," said Nick—"to carry the injured passengers to houses."

"Yes. Well, some of us started to carry a man to the wagon, when that hog got ahead of us. He said he was in a hurry to get to New York, and must be driven over to the other road to catch an early train. We told him he'd get to town just as soon by waiting for the special, but he wouldn't listen. Told us to mind our own business. We said it was our business to look after the injured. 'It's my business to look after number one,' said he, and he gave the farmer fifty dollars to drive him off in a hurry."

"Fifty dollars!" exclaimed Nick, as if surprised; "that's quite a price!"

"So the farmer thought. He seemed to feel pretty small about it. 'But,' said the farmer, 'I don't see fifty dollars all at once in a year, and I can't lose the chance.' Then he added that other wagons would be along soon, and we had to let him go. Now, what kind of a man is it that will rob injured men and women like that?"

"I'll tell you," Nick answered; "he's a criminal."

"It's easy enough to call him that, but it don't explain his conduct. I should think a criminal would have some feelings under the circumstances."

"I call him a criminal," said Nick, "because that is what he is. He is one of the very worst that I ever met."

"So? Are you in the habit of meeting criminals?"

"It is my business."

"Indeed! and this bald-headed man with the fringe of red hair is——"

"A man I've been after for some time. He hurried away because he had tried to kill me. It was his pistol shot you heard. My name is Carter."

"Oh! sometimes called Nick?"

"Always, I think," and the detective smiled.

Mr. Blake held out his hand.

"I'm proud to know you," he said, "and I hope you'll bring that fellow to the gallows."

"We finish them with electricity in my State," responded Nick, shaking hands, "and I shall get the

man, or he'll escape by killing me. I'd rather you wouldn't mention my name at present."

"Very well. I understand. Are you going to follow up the man at once?"

"I thought I would a few minutes ago, but I have changed my mind. He won't take a train on the other road—at least not soon—but some time he'll turn up in New York, and I'll look for him there."

"Isn't that like looking for a needle in a haystack?"

"Not quite. It's a good place to hide in, but I've routed out many a crook there, and I'll rout out this chap, unless, as I say, he kills me in the attempt."

If there had been anything more for them to do in the way of helping injured passengers, they would have been doing it; but all had been cared for, and they walked down the tracks to the end of the freight.

Shortly afterward the special came, and all got aboard.

Nick parted from Mr. Blake in the Jersey City station, and spent some time there before he went home.

He asked trainmen and others about the two men he was interested in, but, as he expected, without result.

The men on the freight that one man had taken had not seen him. He had probably dropped from between the cars at some place where the train slowed up.

No conductor or brakeman on any of the early trains had seen a man who answered to the description of Durk.

"It has been no harm to ask these questions," thought Nick, "for there is always a chance that the cleverest crook will do a foolish thing some time. But if I was in Durk's place, or that of his assistant, I should act just about as he does. Now I'll go home and see what Patsy has to say. It would be a good gamble that he has traced the man, and that he has found that his name is Durk."

Nick's assistants had just finished breakfast when Nick arrived home.

"Well, Patsy," said Nick, "I hope you've got on the track of the crook I asked you to chase up. He has given us a long chase. Have you found him?"

"Yep."

"Good! Have you seen him?"

"Nope. He's away from home, but I've found where he lives and a good deal about him."

"Well, who is he?"

"He's a high-toned gent who lives in Brooklyn, and his name is Richardson."

CHAPTER CLI.

PATSY'S INVESTIGATION.

"H'm!" murmured Nick, thoughtfully, "if I had made that bet, I should have lost it."

"What's the gamble?" asked Patsy.

"Nothing that would cost anything if I lost. I thought it would be a sure winner to bet that you would find that the man's name was Durk."

"Durk! Why, we've met that name twice——"

"Yes, the drunken doctor in Mount Vernon, and the old hag—his sister, in Hoboken. I saw Dr Durk this morning."

"Gee!" exclaimed Patsy; "if we're up against ghosts, you can count me out of the game."

Nick smiled, for he knew that his young assistant had no more belief in ghosts than he himself had.

"The man I saw," said Nick, "is solid flesh and blood. I know because I lifted him. He tried to get a rise out of me with a revolver—but I'll tell you about that later. Sing us your song about this Mr. Richardson. I'm not so sure yet that it won't prove to be Durk, under another name."

"Neither am I; for I didn't get a description of Richardson. I let that go for fear that asking such questions would lead to putting him on to our game. Besides, I didn't think it necessary, now that we know just who and where he is; that is, when he's at home."

"You were quite right, Patsy. Begin at the beginning and let me know every step."

"Well, then, you remember that I tried telephoning the leader of the gang from that thieves' boarding-house in Hoboken?"

Patsy referred to an adventure which was described in a previous number of this weekly. He had gained admission to a house occupied by some members of the gang, and had boldly used the telephone from there in the hope of making the leader of the gang come to the house. All the criminals who lived there were captured, but the leader was too shrewd to fall into the trap.

"You and I," he continued, "agreed that the wire must be a private one, without any connection with central, and in the ruins of the house, after it was blown up, we found a battery and other things to back up that theory."

"We concluded, therefore, that if we could follow up that wire it would bring us to the place where the leader hangs out. I first went to telephone headquarters, thinking that the wire might be controlled by the company, or have been laid by it, but I soon found that nothing was known about it there."

"Then I set out on my own hook to trace the wire."

Patsy told how he found that the wire went over the housetops in Hoboken to the water's edge, which was not far away.

There it disappeared in the water.

So the detective hired a tug and grappling irons.

Among these tools was a steel hook, with a handle more than twenty feet long.

The hook was caught around the wire at the place where it dropped from the dock building into the water, and then the tug steamed slowly ahead.

Two of the crew held the hook handle, while Patsy kept his eyes on the wire, and gave orders.

The operation, of course, kept a part of the wire out of the water. It slipped over the hook as the tug went out into the river.

But before long the weight of the wire on the hook became too heavy for the men with the hook. They

had to let it sink until the grappling irons could be fastened on.

When it was brought up again it was allowed to run across the deck.

In this way the tug followed the direction of the wire until nearly in the middle of the river.

And until that point was reached, the direction had been straight toward the New York shore.

Then it was clear that the strain on the wire was becoming greater.

It sank more nearly straight down.

Patsy saw a danger, and sung out to have the engine stopped.

The wire snapped, and both ends disappeared.

Although he was sorry for the delay, he was not at all discouraged.

"The wire," he said to the crew, "is probably anchored here for some reason or other, and we shall have to grapple for the anchor and pull it aboard."

The men went to work dragging the iron over the bottom of the river until they caught on something.

Then they hauled up.

It was fully half-an-hour before this happened, and while it was going on the detective walked up and down the narrow deck.

The anchor had not been found when he saw a small steam launch passing.

Two men were on board besides the engineer.

The launch passed so close that Patsy saw a number of grappling-irons and other tools on board of her.

He watched the launch with some curiosity, but without any suspicion until he saw that she was heading for the pier that his tug had left when the wire-following began.

A thought occurred to him then, and he went to the wheelhouse to get the captain's marine glass.

With this at his eye, he watched the launch go straight to the spot where the crooks' wire entered the water.

The men on board pulled the wire out of the water in the same way that he had done, the launch backing slowly until it was beyond the pier head.

Then one of the men cut the wire, and allowed the land end to drop.

The other end was kept on board the launch, which steamed north some distance.

The men on the launch held on to the cut end of the wire until they had come to a point about a third of a mile north of Patsy's tug.

There they let the wire drop.

The launch then went further up the river.

Patsy drew a long breath and put up the glasses.

"I see the game," he said to himself. "They suspected that we would try to follow up the wire, and so they have lost it. And if they have lost it at this end it's a pretty safe bet that they have already lost it at the other end."

"Consequently, if we go on chasing up this wire we shall probably find that it ends somewhere in the middle of the bay."

While the men in the launch were at work, Patsy had thought of leaving the wire in midstream and chasing the launch with his tug.

But there were good reasons against that.

He had no charge on which he could put the men under arrest, for they seemed to be ordinary workmen.

They had a long start, and could probably make good their escape to land.

And the chief reason of all was that pursuit of the men would give away the detectives' plan.

They had been a long time trying to catch the leader of this gang of criminals, and they had learned that he was the keenest enemy they had ever tackled.

So they had decided to mask their operations, and not try to carry things with a rush.

The work on the tug was being done so quietly that nobody on the busy river noticed it. Not even the men in the launch had seemed to see why the tug was still in midstream.

Patsy knew that Nick would approve his decision not to make an open chase of the launch, but he was almost discouraged when he realized that the crooks had got ahead of him, for there could be no doubt

that the wire had been cut and removed from its other landing place.

While he was wondering how he could take a fresh start, the crew hauled up the heavy object that their grappling-irons had fastened to.

It proved to be a chunk of iron, weighing not less than three hundred pounds.

It was the anchor for the wire, plainly enough, for an insulator was fastened to it, and the wire was wound around it.

The thing was brought on deck, the wire reaching from it in two directions, for the detective to examine.

He stooped and put his hand on the insulator, scraping away the mud and weeds that had stuck to it.

Presently, he saw some letters stamped into the glass.

"Now I know what to do!" he cried, standing up. The crew looked at him.

"Cut the Jersey end of the wire, sir?" asked one of them.

"Cut both ends," replied Patsy, "and toss them overboard. I've no further use for the wire."

They wondered, for they knew that he was trying to find where the other end of the wire landed, and this order was the same as to say that he had given up the job, but they obeyed.

When the ends of the wire were thrown overboard, Patsy looked on and saw that one of them sank in such a way as to show that the wire stretched southward.

"That means," he thought, "that a turn was made at this anchor. The crook foresaw that some time a detective might try to trace the wire, and he thought he would mislead him by having the wire start toward New York. Probably he thought the detective would suppose that it went straight across the river, and would try to find it somewhere on the New York shore."

"Then he would also think that the detective, after hunting for it on the New York shore, would give up the job as an impossible one."

"But we're not that kind of detectives."

"I'll bet that wire swings around the Battery, and lands somewhere in Brooklyn."

"Where now, sir?" asked the tug captain.

"Christopher street," replied the detective.

A landing at that point was soon made, and the crew took the chunk of iron and the insulator to a dock.

Patsy hired an express wagon, and had the iron loaded into it.

Then he got up beside the driver.

"Stop at the first drug store you come to," he said.

A drug store was soon found, and Patsy asked permission to look at the city directory.

He turned to the names beginning with A, for on the glass insulator he had found a mark like this:

"A. & S."

After turning a good many pages, and running his eyes rapidly down the columns of names, he came upon this firm name:

"Ashton & Smalley, electricians."

The office and factory was on Bleecker street.

Patsy told the expressman to take him there.

When they arrived, Patsy went in and asked if either member of the firm could be seen.

Both men were in the building somewhere, and Patsy went hunting for them, guided by a clerk.

They found Mr. Smalley on the ground floor.

"I've got something that belongs to you, I think," said Patsy. "Found it in the river. I recognized your firm mark, and brought it along in a wagon."

Mr. Smalley looked puzzled.

"Something that belongs to us?" he echoed. "Found in the river? What is it?"

"That's more'n I can tell," replied Patsy. "Better have a look at it."

"I will."

They went out to the street, and Mr. Smalley was even more puzzled when he saw the iron.

He looked carefully at the insulator and the short piece of wire that was wound around it.

"That's our insulator, sure enough," he said, "and

that looks like the kind of wire we furnish. You say you found it in the river?"

"Yes; I was grappling for something, and brought this up."

Mr. Smalley sent for some of his workmen, and had them carry the iron into the office.

Then he sent for his partner, Mr. Ashton.

When the latter came, Mr. Smalley explained what he knew of the matter, and Mr. Ashton was equally puzzled.

"How could anything of ours get down to the bottom of the river?" he asked blankly. "We have never laid a line in the water, have we?"

"Not that I know of."

"Perhaps the foreman will know."

They sent for the foreman.

"Do you know what this is?" asked Mr. Ashton, as soon as the foreman entered.

The man started a little and looked uncomfortable.

"Now we shall have it!" thought the detective.

"Yes," replied the foreman; "I know what it is."

"Well?"

The foreman moved about uneasily, and wiped the sweat from his brow.

"What's the matter?" demanded Mr. Ashton, sharply. "Have you been doing anything wrong?"

"No, sir; not exactly; that is, I think not," stammered the foreman.

"Explain, then!"

"Well, you see, it's a job I did on my own account."

"And you used the firm's materials? Why! that's downright robbery——"

"No, gentlemen, no," interrupted the foreman, hurriedly, "I paid for them, full price. The books will show that."

"When was it done?"

"Last June, sir."

Mr. Ashton stepped to the office door, and told a clerk to bring the June books.

When they had been brought in he ordered the foreman to tell the whole story.

"It was this way, sir," he said; "a man named

Richardson, who is an importer living in Brooklyn, wanted a private telephone between his house and his office, near the docks in Hoboken. He came to me about it. I told him I would speak to the firm.

"No, don't do that," said he; "I want this to be known only to myself and the man who does the work. I'll give you exactly double the regular price for such work if you'll do it without letting anybody know about it."

"It was a good chance for me to make a bit of extra money, gentlemen, and so I figured on the matter and told him what the regular price would be. He agreed to double it, and paid half down. I bought all the materials myself at your regular rates. Look at the books, Mr. Ashton, and you will see."

Both Ashton and Smalley looked over the account books, and found that the man was telling the truth.

"That's all there is to it," added the foreman, "except that this morning I got word from Mr. Richardson that he had no further use for the telephone, and he asked me to have the wires cut at once and carried out into the river at each end."

"Of course I could not attend to that myself, but I hired a couple of men with his money, and I suppose that was how this anchor happened to be found."

The members of the firm looked at Patsy.

They seemed to have forgotten that he was standing there and hearing all that was said.

"I can only say," said Patsy, quietly, "that the men he employed did their work. I saw them at it."

"But it strikes me," said Mr. Ashton, "that you have shown a good deal of interest in the affairs of this firm."

"Yes," Patsy admitted, "and for a good reason, that I will tell you. I am a detective, and I believe this man Richardson to be a criminal. I was following up his wire when I found this anchor. I believe that by coming here I could learn his name and residence, or place of business."

"Astonishing!" exclaimed Ashton, and he turned to the foreman.

"It can't be true," said the latter; "Mr. Richardson is a respectable business man—"

"What is his name?" demanded Patsy.

"Thomas G. D. Rich—"

"Oh!" cried Mr. Smalley; "then it's all right. You've had your trouble for nothing, Mr. Detective. I am acquainted with Thomas Richardson. Why! he goes to the same church that I do."

"Then you won't object to giving me his address?"

"Certainly not! Here it is," and he wrote it on a card. Then he said to the foreman: "You ought not to have taken this private work without letting us know."

"But I did it on holidays and Sundays, sir."

"Very well, but you see what such things lead to. Here's a detective hunting us up for evidence against one of the best known men in Brooklyn. I don't like that. Mr. Richardson doubtless had his good reasons for wanting the fact of his telephone to be unknown, but we should have been informed. We would have kept his secret."

"And I hope you will do so now," said Patsy. "If Mr. Richardson is straight, he'll have no trouble from me. If he isn't, any word to him now might give the smartest rascal I ever knew a chance to escape."

The partners whispered together for a moment, and then gave Patsy their word that nothing would be said by them to hinder his investigation.

The foreman also agreed to keep quiet, and the detective left them.

He went to Brooklyn, and made some careful inquiries in the neighborhood of Richardson's house.

He learned that the man was not married, and that he lived entirely alone, except for two or three servants.

Everybody spoke well of him.

"And that," said Patsy, as he concluded his report to Nick, "is all I know except that Richardson hasn't been at home since the morning after the time I telephoned to him from Hoboken."

CHAPTER CLII.

THE ORGAN GRINDER.

Nick listened to the report with the closest attention.

"Thomas G. D. Richardson," he said, thoughtfully; "I wonder if the D. stands for Durk?"

"You've got Durk on the brain, Nick," said Patsy.

"You'd have the same trouble, if you had seen him, as I did this morning," responded Nick.

He then turned to Chick.

"Did you have a good time at the Tombs?" he asked.

"It was like a vacation," Chick answered; "nothing doing and nothing coming from it."

"Didn't you succeed in getting in with any of the prisoners?"

"Oh, yes. Plenty of them."

"Well?"

"Most of the crooks we have taken from this gang are still waiting trial, and are in cells near each other. The warden, to whom I told my scheme, put me in among them.

"In fact, I occupied a cell with one of the crowd we caught in the Chatham Square dive some time ago.

"I was supposed to be a thief from San Francisco. I told the man in my cell that I was pinched on my first job after striking town, and that I hadn't a friend in the city to help me."

"That ought to have made him open up," said Nick.

"It did. I'll make a short story of it, because I don't think that what I have learned will help you any.

"The crook told me that he and a lot of others were all in an organization, and that they expected to be defended when it came to trial by the best lawyers in the city.

"That was the understanding," said he, "when we went into the scheme. We agreed to take orders, crack just the cribs we were told to, and bring all the

swag to a certain place, where we would be paid half its value.

"The leader agreed if any of us got pinched to look out for him, pay the cost of lawyers, and buy testimony to get us off if possible."

"Do they believe their leader will keep his word?" asked Nick.

"I put that to him. He seemed to be pretty confident, but some of the others were doubtful. They said so many men had been bagged that they feared the leader would go back on them."

"Then, wasn't somebody in the crowd ready to turn State's evidence?"

"I think," Chick answered, "that there are at least half-a-dozen of them who would squeal if they could."

"If they could?" repeated Nick.

"I mean if it would do them any good; if there was anything they could tell that we don't already know."

"Why! they could tell us who their leader is."

"Nick, I don't believe it."

"You don't believe it?"

"No. Every man of them that I got in with told me that he had no idea who the leader was."

"Well! isn't he a corker!"

"He's the dandiest leader of crooks I ever heard of. The men said they had never seen him, never heard his name, and that he never came near them. They had their dealings with him through his assistants, and they said they had heard from him since they were locked up."

"We caught at least two of those assistants, didn't we?"

"I believe so, and you may be sure I did my best to pump them, but they are mum. They won't give up a word. I tried it until I was certain that nothing was to be gained by playing prisoner any more."

"All right," said Nick. "We've tried every scheme we could think of, and, while most of them have failed, we have at last got on the right track. The next thing is to spot this man, Richardson."

He thought a moment, and then added:

"I still feel that the man I met this morning is the one we are after. Patsy says Richardson is away from home. That fact fits with Durk's being on that train.

"It's not likely that Durk, or Richardson, whatever his name is, will go home at once. He will be pretty careful about his movements, and he's so keen that I don't believe we can foresee what he will do.

"Still, we must have his house watched. Is there a boarding-house anywhere near Richardson's, Patsy?"

"Yes; across the street, two doors to the west."

"Good! Ida, you have your orders," and Nick turned, with a smile, to his young lady assistant.

She arose immediately.

"Telephone?" she asked.

"The minute you see him, or hear of his being at home," replied Nick. "You will, of course, telephone in cipher."

"Certainly."

She left the room, and a moment later was on her way to Brooklyn.

"I have an idea," said Nick, after she had gone, "that Durk will send for me."

"What do you mean?" asked Chick and Patsy, together.

Nick then told them about the railroad accident and what had happened afterward.

"That man whom I recognized as Durk," he said, "may not be the leader of this gang, though I think he is, but, in any case, it's clear that he has it in for me."

"Don't you suppose he'll watch me?"

"Sure to!" exclaimed both the others.

"And he'll begin as soon as he can after he thinks it safe for him to come into New York. That may be some time, for it would be like him to come into the city by a roundabout way."

"Yes," said Patsy; "he might go down to Bergen Point, cross over to Staten Island, and come up by the ferry from St. George."

"And that wouldn't take much more time than you took," suggested Chick.

"I was thinking something of that sort," replied Nick. "There are dozens of ways that he could get into the city, and it may be he has begun his operations already. Suppose you take a run to the corner, Patsy, buy a newspaper, and come straight back."

The young man was off instantly.

When he returned he said:

"There's nobody on the street or near that we don't know all about except a dago playing a hand-organ."

Nick looked at the clock, after putting his hand to his vest, forgetting that his watch had been in the vest he lost in the railroad accident.

"It's later than I thought," he said. "An organ-grinder, did you say?"

"Yes, a dago."

Nick was listening.

"I think I hear him," he remarked.

"Sure!" said Patsy. "He's working down this way."

"I'll have a look at him."

Nick went into the front room, and stationed himself at a window where he could look into the street without being seen.

The organ-grinder was then several doors away, looking up at the house before which he was playing.

"If that isn't an ordinary dago, he's mighty well made up," remarked Chick, who was also looking out.

Nick said nothing.

The organ-grinder moved a few paces nearer.

He was on the other side of the street, and they could not see his face.

Nick stood motionless until the organ-grinder changed his tune and faced about.

He certainly did look like an ordinary Italian.

His face was swarthy, he had a short, coal black moustache, his hat and clothes were ragged.

He came slantwise across the street, and halted in front of the house next door to Nick's.

There he began to play again, looking up at the house as before.

Nick stepped away from the window.

"It's a good makeup," he remarked, carelessly.

"Isn't he a dago?" asked Patsy.

And Chick asked:

"Is he your man, Durk?"

"No to both of you," replied Nick. "He isn't heavy enough for Durk. But he's no Italian."

"Who is he, then?"

"I think he's the fellow who laid for me with an ax this morning."

"Then you think Durk has sent for you?"

"I certainly do. There is a way to find out. When he stops in front of the house, toss him a nickel. If he goes on pretty soon, I may doubt; if he stays longer here than anywhere else, I shall feel pretty sure. This is a battle to the death, boys, and I am going to get ready for it."

Nick spoke more gravely than usual, and they understood why.

He had said more than once that he regarded the unknown leader, whom he now called Durk, as his equal in cleverness.

If they ever met, therefore, it would be a struggle of giants, and it was unlikely that both would come out of it alive.

Nick went up to his bedroom and put away the clothes that the farmer had given him; and before he left the house he made out the check that has been referred to that surprised the farmer the next day.

"He was a good-hearted man," thought Nick, "and if anything should happen to me, I'll see that he gets his vote of thanks for his kindness to unfortunate passengers."

He put on clothes of his own, in which were many pockets for the things he always carried with him.

In one pocket he put a revolver and cartridge-box; in another two pairs of the best steel bracelets; in

another his picklock, and his folding pocket lantern, and so on.

When he had done all that he usually did to make ready for a trip, he went to a fireproof safe that stood in a corner of the room and unlocked it.

From one of the drawers in it, which was separately locked, he took a small flask of something that looked like brandy.

Nick examined the cork to see that it was fastened in securely, and then put it in the breast pocket of his coat.

All this time, and he had not hurried at all, he had heard the music of the hand-organ.

When he went downstairs the organ-grinder was still at work in front of his house.

"Did you give him a nickel?" he asked.

"Yes," Chick answered.

"Well, then, good-by. I'm going to accept Durk's invitation and let this fellow lead me."

"Shall we——" Chick began.

"If Ida telephones," Nick interrupted, "follow the clew she gives, according to your own judgment."

This was his way of telling them to stay where they were.

"Nick," said Patsy, "you almost make me feel frightened."

"Why?"

"You seem serious."

"Boys," he responded, smiling; "we are in a dangerous business, and if ever I was up against it I am this trip. I don't fear the result. That wouldn't be like me, would it? But I should be a foolish boaster if I should say that I am going to capture this man Durk. We take chances very often. How do I know that some day a crook will not shoot straight when he tries to kill me? So, all I say now is that I expect to tackle the ablest criminal I can remember meeting, and that I shall get the best of him if I can. You know what that means."

"You bet!" cried Patsy; "it means that Durk, or Richardson, or whatever his name is, will be behind the bars before midnight."

Nick smiled and went out, but when he had gone Patsy looked at Chick and said anxiously: "What do you think, old fellow?" "I bet on Nick," was the reply.

CHAPTER CLIII.

A GAME OF WORRY.

When Nick went out of his house the organ-grinder was beginning a new tune.

The detective hardly glanced at him, but slowly descended the steps, and handed a nickel to him in passing.

"Better move on, my man," he said; "there are no children in that house."

"Grazie, signor," returned the man, touching his ragged hat and grinning.

Nick stopped then and addressed the fellow in Italian.

"Have you had good business this morning?" was the English of what he said.

The organ-grinder stared, looked very much surprised, and his eyes fell.

He stopped playing, muttered something that the detective could not hear, and moved on.

"That settles the last doubt," said Nick to himself. "The fellow doesn't know any Italian except the words for 'thank you, sir.' If he had been a genuine dago he would have replied to me in his own language."

"I wonder if he realizes that I have tumbled? I hope he does, for I want him to think that I am shadowing him."

The detective went to the corner, and looked back as he turned.

The organ-grinder was playing in front of a house a few doors beyond Nick's.

But he was not looking up at the house. Instead, he was facing up the street, and his eyes were on the detective.

Nick went half-way around the block, entered a house there that he owned, passed through it and by

an underground passage to the one he lived in, and went upstairs to the street floor.

Chick and Patsy were still in the front room.

They heard their chief, but, knowing what he was about, and having expected just that move, they said nothing.

Nick opened the door, went down the steps and turned toward the organ-grinder.

The fake Italian was looking toward Nick's house, and when he saw the detective come from it, he was so startled that he stopped turning the crank.

He began again as soon as he saw that Nick was coming toward him, and he looked the other way, pretending that he had not seen the detective.

Nick halted beside him, and slowly took a nickel from his pocket and laid it on the wagon.

The man tried to bow and say "Thanks," but the word stuck in his throat.

He stopped playing again, and began to lift his organ to his back.

"Excuse me," said Nick, politely; "have you seen a man near here with an ax?"

The organ-grinder started and drew back. Then he stood still and answered:

"No understan', signor!"

"Oh! don't you? I thought you spoke English," said Nick. "It doesn't matter. There's a man in this neighborhood who tried to kill me with an ax. I thought you might have seen him. Good-morning, sir."

With that the detective walked slowly on.

"I've got him rattled now," he said to himself. "First he was upset to see me come out of the house a moment after I had disappeared around the corner. He's wondering now if there are two of me, and he doesn't know what to make of my talk about an ax. He's frightened, and my hope is that he will hurry to his boss. He can't do that too fast."

It seemed as if that was what the organ-grinder meant to do, for Nick looked around in a moment and saw him going in the opposite direction.

The detective immediately turned and followed,

walking rapidly until the organ-grinder looked over his shoulder.

At that, Nick dropped to a slow walk and bent his head, as if he were thinking deeply.

The organ-grinder hurried on, and so did Nick, and they reached the corner almost together.

Nick apparently paid no attention to the man, who started up the avenue and turned to the left at the first street.

He looked back at Nick as he did so, and Nick, still with his head down, turned the same corner.

The fellow broke into a run.

Nick walked his fastest, and kept fairly near.

About half way down the block the organ-grinder stopped suddenly, unslung his organ and went to grinding.

Nick had slowed up at once, and the music machine was in full blast when he came alongside.

Pausing, just as before, the detective took a nickel from his pocket and laid it on the organ.

He said nothing, but walked slowly on a few paces.

For an instant the music stopped, and Nick felt a light blow on his back.

It was followed by a metallic tinkling at his feet.

The organ-grinder, maddened by the detective's tactics, had hurled the nickel after him.

Nick paid no attention to the coin, but stepped to the curb, took out his watch, and held it in his hand, while he looked toward the fake Italian.

The fellow couldn't stand that very long.

In less than two minutes his eyes were bulging with fright, and the sweat was pouring down his face.

He hastily slung the organ across his shoulders again, and started down the street, crossing to the other side, but going in the general direction in which Nick was standing.

He looked back at the detective as he passed on the other side.

Nick calmly pocketed his watch and followed.

Again the fellow ran, and this time Nick ran also,

for he thought the man might catch a car at the corner.

In fact, that happened.

The organ-grinder hailed a south-bound car, threw his organ on the rear platform and scrambled aboard.

He had no sooner got on than Nick also stepped to the platform, and the conductor gave the signal to go ahead.

The car started, and the organ-grinder, now deathly pale, went inside.

Nick remained on the platform, and lit a cigar.

He smoked calmly, and never once looked at the man he was worrying.

Even when the conductor ordered the man to take his organ off the platform, Nick did not seem to notice what happened.

"Here, dago," said the conductor; "you can't leave this thing here. It's in the way. Hold it on your knees or put it on the front platform."

The man, with a scared look at the detective, pulled the organ into the car and held it.

He looked often at Nick, and perhaps he began to think he was mistaken about the man who seemed to be following him. Anyhow, when at last the car got to South Ferry, the organ-grinder went out by the front door without looking behind him.

And yet the detective did not look at him.

The organ-grinder almost touched him in passing, darted among the waiting cars, and got aboard one that was bound uptown.

Before it started Nick was on board also.

"I can keep this up as long as he can," he thought, but there was nothing in his face to show that he cared what the fake Italian did.

This time the journey was not so long.

A little way above Canal street the organ-grinder left the car again by the front door, and Nick stepped off at the rear.

The car went on, but the organ-grinder stood still. There was a look of desperation on his face.

"See here!" he said, harshly; "you're following me."

"Who?" returned Nick, quietly; "me?"

"Yes, you!" cried the other.

"Oh!" said Nick, as if he understood; "you."

The organ-grinder gnashed his teeth.

His courage was going fast.

"You," he said, pointing a finger at Nick, "follow me."

He was about to say more, but Nick interrupted.

"Ah, yes, me," pointing to himself, "you," pointing to the man. "Yes, yes; perfectly clear now. Ha! ha!" and he laughed as if he were very much pleased.

The organ-grinder uttered a savage oath, and ran with all his speed down the street toward the river.

Loaded, as he was, with his organ, he could not make great speed, and Nick trotted easily after and kept close to him.

They came to a place where a building had been torn down, and a fence had been put up around the empty lot.

The man ahead, without stopping in his run, threw the organ over the fence.

After that he made greater speed, but there was no shaking his pursuer.

People on the street stared at them, and a policeman they met looked as if he thought of interfering, but neither the fugitive nor Nick said anything, and they were not stopped.

At last the man ahead turned suddenly into a large warehouse and shut the door behind him.

Nick, six feet behind, heard the click of a lock as a key was turned.

CHAPTER CLIV.

IN THE POWER OF A VILLAIN.

It has often been remarked by Nick Carter's friends that he knew everything about the city of New York.

Like enough that was over-stating it, but he was forever surprising them with information about things in the city, and when they expressed their surprise he would say that it was necessary to his business to know all about such matters.

For example, there was the building into which the fake Italian had gone; Nick knew that it was part of some property over which there was a lawsuit, and that it had been standing empty for months. He knew that nobody would have a legal right to use the building until the lawsuit was settled.

We will not stop to inquire what was in his thoughts when the fugitive entered the building, but will attend only to what he did.

Without any delay, he applied his picklock, and turned the bolt easily, for it was an ordinary lock.

Then he went in and closed the door behind him.

It was very dark in there, and for a moment the detective, having come in from broad daylight, could see nothing.

He heard no sound, and he quickly, but with perfect silence, stepped to one side.

His hand, which he held before him, came against something that seemed to be a bale of dry goods.

Nick halted there and waited.

After a full minute, he suddenly leaped in the darkness, came against a man who was crouching, and caught him by the throat.

That was with one hand. With the other Nick tore a knife from the man's grasp and let it fall to the floor.

He put his foot on the knife, and flashed his pocket lantern on the scene.

The light revealed the fake Italian struggling to tear Nick's fingers from his throat.

"Hello!" said Nick, calmly, but as if somewhat surprised, "is that you again? Going to show me through the house?"

With that he pushed the fellow away, but kept the rays of the lantern upon his face.

The man fell to his knees, and stayed there a moment, snarling like a mad beast.

He kept his savage eyes on the detective, and slowly got to his feet.

"Curse you!" he hissed.

"All right," responded Nick; "that goes. I'll try to stand it."

The man looked as if he thought of springing upon the detective, and trying to overcome him, but he must have known that that would be the most foolish thing he could do; and, after a moment, he suddenly darted toward the door.

Nick let him pass without a word, pocketed his lantern, and followed him out.

Then for hours the strange chase continued.

Wherever the man went, there Nick went, too, never trying to conceal his movements, and never interfering with the fugitive.

Now and then, when he could foresee clearly what effort the man might make to shake him off, he would let the fellow get out of sight for a few minutes, but it would only be to pop up in front of him just when he believed that he had shaken his pursuer.

If the fellow had been an innocent man, he could have had his tormentor arrested, but of course he didn't try that, and, at last, late in the afternoon, when it was beginning to grow dark, he took a car that carried him to Brooklyn Bridge.

From that time, he did not look at the detective, and gave up his efforts to break away.

He hung his head sullenly, and when he left the car he walked slowly.

For nearly two miles he wandered around the streets, coming finally to a place where there was a row of new houses.

Without looking around to see if the detective were following, he went into a house in the middle of the row.

This house and most of the others appeared to be finished, but there were some where work was still going on; not at this hour, though, for it was so late that the workmen had gone home.

Nick drew a long breath.

He had stopped on the opposite side of the street, and was looking at the row of houses.

"I think this is the end," he said to himself. "It isn't the place where Patsy said that Richardson lives, but, just the same, I think I shan't have to go any further."

He went over and climbed the steps to the front door. His picklock was in his hand, for he expected to get in, as he had done at the warehouse, but he found that the door was not wholly closed.

The edge of the door was against the frame, but the latch had not caught.

"My man may be getting out through the back yard," thought the detective.

He pushed the door open quickly and stepped in.

On the instant that his feet crossed the threshold he received a terrific blow on the top of his head.

An iron weight had been fastened above the door and held there in such a way that the opening of the door would cause it to fall.

Nick staggered forward, reaching out his hands blindly, for all he could see was flashes of light and shooting stars.

He knew that another blow fell upon him—a blow that caused all the stars to disappear.

And then he thought that he was drowning.

His head seemed to be above water, and the waves were dashing against his face, but he could not swim. He was so worn out with the struggle that he could not move either arms or legs.

Another wave splashed against his face, and he opened his eyes.

At first he could not understand it.

He blew the water from his mouth and tried to wipe it from his eyes.

Then he understood why he could not do so.

His arms were above his head, the wrists fastened together and chained to a ringbolt in the wall.

His ankles were also chained and fastened to another ringbolt.

A gas jet was burning at the other side of the room.

By its light he saw the man he had followed for so many hours standing in front of him, with a glass of water raised to throw.

Beyond him, sitting in a chair and smoking a cigar, was Durk.

The man with the glass of water grunted when the detective opened his eyes, and set the glass on a shelf.

"Ah!" said Durk, harshly, "I began to fear that we had overdone it, and that I should not have the pleasure of talking with you, Nick Carter."

Nick tried to make answer, and only then realized that a ruler had been fastened in his mouth, so that he could make no more than a gurgling sound when he tried to talk.

Durk turned to the other man and added:

"No need to throw any more water in his face, Leary. Get ready to unfasten the ruler."

Leary went to the detective's side, and Durk stood up, taking a revolver from his pocket.

"I can miss a running man in the night," he said, "but at a distance of ten feet, with my target steady, I can hit the mark. Now, understand me, Carter. Your time has come at last. It's a question of hours at the most. You can make it a question of seconds, if you want to. When that ruler is taken from your mouth you may cry out if you think it will do you any good. I don't think you will, for you're not that kind of a man, but if you do I shall fire; and I shan't miss this time. Understand?"

Nick moved his eyes to indicate that he did, for he could not make any other motion.

Then Leary took away the ruler.

Durk stood with the revolver raised for a moment, before he settled back in his chair.

"That's right," he said; "look around you, Carter, and see what's going to happen. You're a pretty clever sort of a man, and you have wonderful luck—but take it all in and see what a fix you've got into this time."

He spoke thus because the detective was not paying any attention to him or Leary, but, now that he could move his head from side to side, was looking over the room:

It was evidently a rear room in the house, but whether on first or second floor he could not decide.

There were two windows, but the blinds were closed and the curtain drawn, doubtless for the purpose of preventing any light from appearing on the outside.

Only one article of furniture interested him.

This was a tall clock—one of the old-fashioned kind, generally called a "grandfather's clock."

It stood at one side of the room, and the first thing that Nick noticed about it was that the hands showed that it was a quarter to twelve o'clock.

"That means they'll kill me at midnight," he thought.

Next he saw how the deed was done.

From the front of the clock a pistol stuck out.

The detective did not need to be told that the pistol was connected with the mechanism of the clock, so that it would be fired at a certain time.

Indeed, he saw that a fine cord was tied to the trigger of the weapon and that the other end of the cord was in the shape of a loop that hung on the clock's

face. The loop was fastened near the figure "6" on the dial.

When Nick had taken this in, he looked over at Durk.

"Well?" he said.

"Well!" roared Durk, furiously, "will nothing shake your nerve?"

"That thingamajig won't," Nick replied, jerking his head toward the clock.

Durk glared at him, and fingered his revolver as if he would like to put the stubborn detective out of the way at once, but he held back because he wanted to torture him, and have the pleasure of making the detective feel that he was beaten at last.

"You see," Nick added, "I know so much about you that I don't see any reason for anxiety. Of course, I admit that this position you've got me in isn't exactly comfortable. It's kind of wearing to the arms and back, but if it suits you, I'm satisfied. Anything to oblige, you know."

Durk ground his teeth. He had had some hope that the detective would whine and beg for mercy.

"What do you know about me?" he demanded.

"Well, for one thing," replied Nick, "I know that your name is Durk and that you pass in Brooklyn for Thomas Richardson."

For a moment the villain sat silent. Then he said:

"You get my name, I suppose, from my resemblance to my twin brother."

"Yes," said Nick, who, in thinking it over, had come to the conclusion that this must be the fact; "the twin brother whom you murdered in Mount Vernon."

"That's right," admitted the scoundrel, nodding; "that's right. If he, the drunken fool, hadn't bungled that job you never would have blocked it, and you never would have left that house alive. I saw that my brother was a hopeless case. He would have queered anything I might try to do. So I ended him and made up my mind that I wouldn't rest until I had ended you."

"Funny!" exclaimed Nick, smiling.

"Funny!" roared Durk; "what's funny?"

"Why, that we both should have had the same thought. I didn't know who you were then, but I left that place where you murdered your brother with just that plan about you. And I'll admit that you've kept me pretty busy."

"Well," said Durk, "I'll admit that you've scored against me several times, but he laughs best who laughs last. Isn't that so, Carter?"

"Oh, yes. Better have your laugh now, Durk; something might happen to prevent it if you wait."

"Do you mean that I'd better kill you on the spot?"

"Take it that way if you want to. I was only thinking that it isn't time yet to speak of the last laugh."

"No; but it will be before another day passes. I'm going to have the satisfaction first of making you suffer. I didn't take up the business I'm in without knowing how to handle it."

"That's right."

"You've defeated me several times," Durk went on, "because I have to employ men who are not my equals. Also, because you have good luck. But your good luck is at an end, and when you are out of the way I shall get new men around me, and I'll make the city buzz with crime. I don't mind speaking plainly, you see, for you won't tell about it."

"There are others," suggested Nick.

"Your assistants!" cried Durk. "Yes, but when their leader is gone they will be as good for nothing as my men are without me to lead them. Just the same, I tell you now that the next job after you are gone will be to get those Smart Alecks, Chick and Patsy, out of the way."

"Yes," said Nick, "that's a good plan, a very good plan. And then there's Petey. You mustn't forget Petey."

"Who is Petey?" demanded Durk, suddenly interested.

"I thought you didn't know Petey. It wouldn't be safe for you to leave him alive. Petey is my old cat. You might find him most any night in the yard back of my house."

Durk sprang to his feet, choking with rage.

Leary, too, was in a fury, and he aimed his revolver at the detective.

"Stop!" shouted Durk. "I'll not have him killed while he's laughing at us. I'm here to make him suffer, and I'll do it."

He finished with a savage oath, and dropped back into his chair.

"See here," he went on; "I'm going to prove to you that you're not so clever as you think you are. You've stacked up against your equal this time, Car-

ter, and I'll make you believe it before you are snuffed out."

"I didn't know you were on that train this morning, and I didn't recognize you till I saw you outside. What happened then I won't repeat, for you know all about it——"

"And I got the best of you," interrupted Nick.

"Oh! did you? I think not. Didn't we get away?"

"And didn't I live to find out who you are?"

"Only to get in my power, Carter. Listen to me."

"Spiel."

"Ugh! I hired this house weeks ago for just the purpose I am putting it to now, for I knew that some day I could lead you here. Do you suppose I hired it in the name of Gideon Durk, or of Thomas C. D. Richardson? Hardly. It was hired by one of my men who is now in the Tombs waiting trial."

"By the way," said Nick, "that man tells me he expects you to furnish him with a good lawyer and to provide fake testimony in his favor."

Durk's eyes opened wide.

He stared speechless at the detective a moment.

"I don't believe it!" he cried.

"Oh, yes you do."

"I don't care, then. What I want you to understand is that I have covered my tracks in using this house. The rent is paid for six months. When I go out to-night, it won't be entered until at least that time has expired. Then the owner may come in, and he'll find your body."

"Beautiful!" murmured the detective.

"I want you to understand how you came here," Durk went on. "I sent Leary to your street to see if you were at home——"

"He found me."

"Yes, and, thanks to your infernal worrying, he lost his head. But he kept to his instructions pretty well. He led you to the warehouse, hoping that you'd give up the chase, and, when you got in, he tried to end the matter there, but you were too much for him. I don't find any fault with Leary. He's been my right-hand man all the time. It was he who first telephoned with your man when you pulled the joint in Hoboken. But no matter about that. Leary's orders were, if you followed him, to bring you here after nightfall, and he succeeded in that."

"I was waiting for you, and we had you knocked out in no time. Then we waited a while to see if

any of your crew had followed. It proved that you were alone, and we tied you up where you are now. I didn't care to have you come to much before midnight, but it began to look as if you'd never wake, so we threw water in your face to rouse you.

"Now then, Carter, what do you think of it?"

"Pretty well done for amateurs," replied the detective.

At that moment the tall clock struck twelve times. Durk got up.

"Amateurs!" he exclaimed, hotly. "I'll show you! I won't waste any more time with you. Fix the clock so it won't strike again, Leary, and put it in position."

CHAPTER CLV.

THE LAST LAUGH.

Leary opened the clock and took out the hammer, which he threw on the floor.

Then he moved the clock so that the pistol fastened to it pointed at Nick's heart.

He took a good deal of pains about this, and Durk helped him.

"See this loop?" asked Durk, when all was ready.

"Yes," Nick answered, "it's fixed so that the hour hand will catch it at six o'clock in the morning."

"Right! and the hour hand will carry it slowly up the dial. The further up it goes, the straighter the cord will get. At exactly twelve o'clock the cord will be pulled tight. This is a hair trigger pistol, Carter, and the instant the cord tightens, it will fire. So you see you've got until twelve o'clock, noon, to think about it. At that hour, Thomas G. D. Richardson will be attending to his respectable business as an importer, and Leary, his head clerk, will be with him."

"I should think you'd want to see it happen," suggested Nick.

"You know I wouldn't take the risk of discovery, Carter. Now, there is one more thing. I've had the hammer taken from the clock, so that it won't strike. That will make the time seem longer to you between now and daylight."

"Very thoughtful of you."

"You'll think so!" hissed Durk, fearfully enraged at the detective's coolness, and Leary looked as if he thought that their prisoner had some secret way of escaping.

But Leary was frightened for nothing. Nick was caught and held in such a way that he could not use his great strength. And, as a matter of fact, he knew no way by which he could hope to free himself.

"Fasten the ruler in, Leary," said Durk.

"Wait just a minute," exclaimed Nick.

His tone was very serious, and Durk turned with a smile, for he thought that at last the strong-hearted detective was weakening. And that seemed to be the case.

"I've been jollying you," Nick went on, "because there was no use in doing anything else, but, of course, I'm not such a fool as to deny that you've got me. That's the case, and I won't waste your time by begging for my life."

"Oh, do!" cried Durk. "I should like to hear you!"

He grinned ferociously, and Leary's eyes blazed with villainous pleasure.

"No," said Nick, "I won't do that; but I will ask one last favor. You can't have so much against me that you won't grant it."

"What is it?"

"I've been strung up here some hours already, haven't I?"

"Yes."

"And I've got a long time to stand it before the end. I'm already terribly thirsty——"

"Ha! he suffers, Leary! he suffers!"

"Shall I throw some more water in his face?" chuckled Leary.

"That would be better than nothing," said Nick, piteously, "but, for Heaven's sake, man, do a little better by me."

"He wants us to go to the nearest saloon and buy him a ball!" Leary cried, almost dancing with delight.

"No," Nick said, "not that; but I've got a little liquor in my pocket——"

"Which pocket?" asked Durk.

"Inside breast."

"Get it out, Leary."

Grinning like a fiend, Leary went up to Nick and took from the pocket indicated the small flask that the detective had taken from his safe at home.

"Brandy!" cried Leary, "and I'll bet it's hot stuff."

"Won't you give me a drink of it?" asked Nick.

"Oh!" answered Durk, "say that again! Beg like a good one!"

He took the flask from Leary and held it before the detective.

"Just a little, Durk," pleaded Nick, his voice trembling.

"Not a drop!" roared the villain. "Nick Carter, you die at noon, and I hope you'll suffer a thousand deaths from thirst before the fatal hour arrives. Come on, Leary."

He strode out of the room, and Leary followed, having first replaced the ruler in Nick's mouth and turned off the gas.

"Oh, wouldn't Nick Carter like a drink?" he cried, tauntingly, as he closed the door.

Nick heard them going along the hall toward the front of the house, and, chained there in the darkness before that murder machine, he smiled.

How the dreary hours passed he could not tell, for he could not see the clock and it no longer struck.

It ticked and ticked away, and with every minute the strain on Nick's muscles grew greater.

He was tied so that his weight hung on his wrists, and it is wholly probable that an ordinary man would have fainted with pain.

But Nick Carter was trained for endurance.

If his enemies crept back to enjoy his torment, they must have been disappointed, for no groan came from his throat.

Nick did not faint away; but, strange as it may seem, he slept.

It was not a deep, comfortable sleep, but it was unconsciousness that caused some of the hours to pass quickly; for he opened his eyes at last to daylight.

It was not a bright light, for the windows were too heavily curtained for that, but he could see the clock in front of him.

It was half-past eight.

The hour hand had caught the loop and was steadily carrying it up the dial.

Three hours and a half to live!

The detective had thought that perhaps the scheme wouldn't work; that the hour hand might miss the loop; but it had caught, and unless a miracle should happen, there was no hope.

His great strength was well-nigh exhausted by the strain upon his arms and back, but his mind was calm.

He thought of his past without shame.

As for the future, he simply felt no concern.

So calm was he that he wondered if he would feel the bullet when it entered his heart.

Again he dozed, waking from time to time to see that the hour hand had carried the loop still further toward the top.

The cord was nearly straight, but Nick could hardly read the time.

He was terribly sleepy, the drowsiness of exhaustion.

At last he could see but one hand on the clock's face.

The hour hand had crept under the minute hand, and in another minute it would pass the "12" mark.

The fatal hour had come! But there was the sound of voices—the opening of doors—hurried steps on stairs.

"They took me up to the second floor," thought Nick, his mind even at the last working in its usual way, reasoning out one fact from another.

The door of his death chamber was burst in, but he was too far gone to see who entered.

"Great God!" cried a shocked voice.

A leap across the floor, so that the house shook with it, a blow and over went the clock on its side.

And, as it struck the floor, there was a flash of fire, a puff of smoke, a loud report, and the deadly bullet was buried harmless in the house wall.

"Never touched me," said Nick, faintly, and once again he lost consciousness.

When he came to, Chick was kneeling beside him, rubbing his limbs, and Patsy was forcing liquor between his lips.

"All right, boys," he said, feebly: "Go slow now. Give me a little time and I'll be with you."

He moved his arms a little.

"Feels good," he muttered. "I had forgotten how it seemed to have any arms."

Then, Chick helping him, he sat up.

Near him was the clock, still on its side, and he saw the ringbolts to which he had been fastened.

"That was the closest call yet, boys," he said. "How did you manage it?"

"It was this way," Chick answered. "Pat was nervous when you left home yesterday to chase that organ-grinder—"

"Yesterday—only yesterday?" asked Nick.

"That's all; but it seems longer to us, and I suppose it was a good deal longer to you. Well, Pat

had a case of nerves. He couldn't sit still after you went out the second time."

"I'm not ashamed of it now," interrupted Patsy, "but the fact is, I was scared. I thought something was going to happen, so I shadowed you and your man."

"Oh! then that explains it."

"Yes. I tagged around after you all day, and at last saw you go into this house. Then I felt ashamed. 'Nick knows what he's about,' says I, 'and if I hang around I shall queer his play.' So I went home."

"We didn't think much of it when you didn't come home in the evening," Chick went on, "but this morning we got pretty nervous, both of us. We hadn't heard from Ida, and, to make it short, we determined to come over here and see what was up."

"And you got here just in time."

"So it seems. I suppose now that we've got to take a fresh start after that rascal——"

"Durk? Yes, that's his name, *alias* Richardson. No, Chick, unless I am very much mistaken, Durk and his last accomplice are held by a stronger hand than ours, or that of the law. You know I said this would be a battle to the death?"

"Yes, but I don't see the end of it."

"Nor I—yet; but let me get up. I can walk now, I am sure."

They helped Nick to his feet, and he smiled when he found how unsteady he was.

"I was strung up a pretty long time," he said, as if it was necessary to apologize; "twelve hours that I know about."

He sat down in Durk's chair for a moment, but his strength came back to him fast.

"Let's take a look around," he said, rising. "I think Durk and his man are still in the house."

Patsy drew his revolver.

"You won't need it," said Nick.

He led them from the room and along the hall.

"If they had gone downstairs," he remarked, "I should have heard them, but I didn't know I was upstairs, till I heard you boys coming. Here"—he paused by the door to a front room—"let's try this."

Before turning the knob, he knelt and smelt at the keyhole.

"Yes, this is the place," he added, "and it will be perfectly safe to go in now. They've been here twelve hours."

He opened the door and stood aside, after a glance into the room.

Chick and Patsy halted on the threshold in astonishment.

At a table sat both Durk and Leary, their heads drooping, both stone dead.

There was a small flask in Durk's hand, and near it was a drinking-glass.

The flask was empty.

"Poisoned!" exclaimed Patsy.

"Not exactly," said Nick, "but it amounts to the same thing. That flask held something that looked like brandy. It was really the most dangerous thing known to chemistry. When it is exposed to the air it instantly sends off fumes that choke any who are near it. One breath of it means death. They thought they were going to rob me of a little brandy, but they didn't get any further than to open the flask. They didn't pour out a drop of it. In these twelve hours all the stuff has evaporated. We'd better not stay here, for there is enough left in the air to make us sick."

He closed the door and they left the house.

All the facts, of course, were promptly made known to the law officers, and, except for testifying in court against their prisoners, that was the last of their dealings with Durk's great gang. The gang had been broken up before, and the death of the leader finished the affair.

It should be said, however, that, at Nick's suggestion, a search was made in the warehouse to which Leary had led him, and many thousand dollars' worth of goods were found there, all of which had been stolen.

That property was identified by its owners, and recovered.

This great case having been finished, Nick and his assistants were once more ready to take up other work. There was always plenty for them to do, and they had only to take their pick.

TO BE CONTINUED.

Next week's issue will contain the account of Nick Carter and the King of the Tramp Thieves. Read of the plucky undertaking of Patsy's in joining the tramp thieves and what happened when he was discovered by them.

FUN FOR EVERYBODY!

This is where all of the funniest stories sent in by the contestants in the new contest will appear. Here are some right off the bat just sent in. Read them, boys, and then send in your own.

We expect to make these pages the funniest that were ever printed. The boys who read them will get a fund of stories that will keep their friends laughing for a week.

The Minstrel Show.

Scene—Doctor's Office.

Interlocutor: I saw you passing my office to-day.

Sambo: Your office! That ash barrel.

Int.: No; I keep a drug store. I am a doctor and druggist.

Sambo: We belong to the same fraternity.

Int.: Do you know anything about medicine?

Sambo: I ought to know something about medicine. I used to take care of a doctor's horse.

Bones: Me, too; I know all about medicine. I washed the doctor's wagon.

Int.: Then you know something about *materia medica*. You are well versed in medicine.

Sambo: Yes; I'm a surgeon.

Int.: Well, since you are doctors, I am going to interrogate you on the subject of medicine. Now, let me ask you a question. Suppose a Dutch baker was along the street and should slip and fall and sprain his back, what would you call that?

Bones: A Dutch twist.

Int.: If a dude should fall and sprain his wrist, what would you call that?

Sambo: A monkey wrench.

Int.: If you should see a man hanging, what would you do?

Bones: Cut him down.

Int.: Medically speaking?

Sambo: Cut him up.

Int.: If a man should swallow a pound of gunpowder, what would you do?

Sambo: Get his money, light a match to him and fire him off.

Int.: If a man was to fall through a coal hole and break both legs, what would you do?

Bones: Get him arrested for stealing coal?

Int.: If a little boy should accidentally swallow a bottle of ink, what would you do to relieve him?

Sambo: Stuff him full of blotting paper.

Int.: If a man would walk into your office with a raging toothache, what would you do?

Bones: Pull his tooth.

Int.: If he had a sprained ankle?

Sambo: Pull his leg.

The Irishman and the Mule.

(By E. Vernon Holbert, Stapleton, S. I., N. Y.)

An Irishman who had just arrived in this country from his native isle saw for the first time a farmer who was ploughing with mules. He scratched his head and

asked what kind of animals them was he was ploughing with. The farmer told him they were mules, and the Irishman seemed very anxious to own a pair and asked him where he got them. The farmer then told him they were raised from eggs on which you had to sit for eight weeks before the young mules appeared, and he said he had two eggs he would sell for five dollars apiece.

The green Irishman said he would buy them and the farmer gave him, in exchange for his ten dollars, two large pumpkins.

The Irishman took his pumpkins or mule eggs home and sat on them for eight weeks, and as no mules came out of them, he got angry and determined to throw them away, so he took them to a hill near by and threw them down it, and it happened that one of them struck a tree behind which sat a rabbit, and as the pumpkin struck the tree it burst, and the rabbit, being frightened, ran away, and the Irishman, seeing the rabbit, and on account of its long ears, he thought it was a young mule, and he yelled to it:

"Come back, you bugger; I'm your father."

Cure for Rheumatism.

(By Charles Dietrich, Chicago, Ill.)

Once upon a time—that's the way all stories begin, you know—there was a man who had rheumatism so bad that he could hardly walk. So he bought one of these push-chairs and hired a servant to push him around where he felt like going.

Well, one day he said, "Jim, it's a nice cool day. Do you think you could push me a few miles out of town?"

Jim said, "Yes, sir," and Jim started to push him on the main road leading out of the city.

It did not take him as long as he thought it would, for everything was so nice and quiet. At last they reached a spot where Jim could rest. Jim sat down under a tree and fell asleep. The sick man looked about him and suddenly he saw a wild bull coming toward them at full speed and bellowing wildly. As it came Jim heard the noise, and he jumped up and rubbed his eyes and started to run for dear life. The cripple saw him running and yelled for him to come back and save him, but if Jim heard him he kept on running. The cripple had a hard time of it, for the bull was only a few rods away. The cripple leaned up straight and fell out of the chair just in time, for the bull knocked the chair into a thousand pieces. The cripple in his excitement jumped up and started to run after Jim. He caught up with Jim a half a mile from the city. Jim, thinking that the bull had killed his master and that this was his ghost, ran

all the faster. His master, thinking that he had seen the bull, ran all the faster, too, keeping up with the other and running in the city, yelling as if insane. The police arrested them both. They told the judge their story, and were then let go. The papers were full of it. People laughed at them, but the cripple did not care, for the excitement had cured him, and he walks now as well as any one.

He Couldn't Carve It.

(By Robert Hynes, Kentucky).

John Williams married a girl who had two sisters, and one was married to a fellow named Jim. The single girl was always bragging about Jim before John. One Sunday John's wife gave her sisters a dinner. She had been married three years, and the chicken she had was an old rooster which her mother gave her when she married. It was so tough that she boiled it from Thursday morning till Sunday morning, and it did not get tender, but she dressed it with oysters and baked it brown. At dinner John was the carver, but the chicken was tough, and his knife dull, and he could not cut the chicken. His sister-in-law began to talk of how her brother Jim could carve. John grew madder and madder, till he could not hold his temper. He suddenly took the chicken from the dish and holding it in his hand he kicked it out in the yard, and replied at the same time: "I don't think Jim or any other common man could carve this sun of a gun."

An Antiquated Taterbug.

(By T. Grover, Kerth, Arkansas.)

Miss Felicia Taterbug was the belle of Tightwad Corners. She was a nice young girl of perhaps three or four dozen summers, and that horrid nose on her lemon-tempered front-piece was well calculated to give you the influenza at first glance. Just one goo-goo eye from her had a tendency to remind you of the time you tied the tails of old Towser and Tom together and threw them over the clothes line.

But she was rich, her father having died and left her sixty-eight cents—all in two-cent postage stamps—and an angel-colored mule way out West in the mining camp of Diehard, Mexico. Consequently her company was much sought.

One Sunday at church, Mr. Farragut Wishbone, a superannuated widower, sidled up to her and asked for her company. He leered so lovingly at her that she fell over a stump in a paralytic fit, but she soon recovered and from that time they were awfully soft on each other. I must not forget to mention Miss Taterbug's nephew, Little Tommy Tiresome, a blue-eyed, angel-faced cherub who was a whole team and a dog under the wagon for jollity. Being a regular juvenile Nick Carter for hunting mischief, he soon discovered that his aunt had a "feller." Like a Nero, he vowed vengeance upon her.

One Sunday he chanced to go into the parlor. With an eye ever open for fun, he grabbed the family Bible and quickly turned to the chronicle of births. There stood the record: F. Taterbug, born 1870.

With a lugubrious grin on his radiant mug, he erased the seven and substituted four. This made it read: F. Taterbug, born 1840. Chuckling all over with satisfaction, he closed the book, placed it on the center table and was about to skedaddle, when there came a soft knock on the parlor door. Softly he opened it and there stood the widower.

"Is Miss Taterbug in?" Mr. Wishbone inquired.

"Yessir," grinned Tommy. "She just now yelled downstairs for her cork leg."

"Her cork leg?"

"Yessir. She bought a new one yesterday and I am making bottle stoppers out of the old one."

Mr. Wishbone, much bewildered, thought there must be a sad mistake.

"You surely don't mean Miss Felicia Taterbug, do you?"

"Yessir. I mean Aunt Felicia Taterbug. She's almost seventy years old."

"What's that?" the widower gasped, and he looked as if "he'd been sent for and couldn't go."

"That's the gospel truth, and I'm a Sunday-school boy," chuckled Tommy. "If you thought of marrying her you've run the risk of your life, for she's killed a dozen people, and you'd a been the thirteenth one."

"Can such be possible?" sighed Mr. Wishbone.

"Yessir. Afore you'd a been married two weeks she'd a worshipped you with the bald-headed end of a broom. But I'll go up and tell aunty you are here." And with that Tommy left him. Heartsick, the widower paced the floor, but suddenly a suspicion began to dawn upon him. Just then catching sight of the old Bible, he decided to investigate. But the black truth flared him in the face.

"The kid told the truth," he muttered. "This lacks but a week or two of being 1902, and she is nearly sixty-two. Great heavens! Who'd a' thought it."

Just then Miss Taterbug appeared on the scene, and with girlish impulsiveness fell on his bosom. Old Wishbone didn't "gee wuth a copper," but tore loose and began to bestow his blessing. The old maid seemed to catch Mr. Wishbone's spirit immediately for her arms began to work like double-jointed piston rods. For about ten minutes the air was filled with a double-dyed extract of compressed hot air, alias "shemale and hemale cuss words." After the battle had ceased the wishbone was in a sadly dilapidated condition, but the old maid was game as ever. She soon discovered her nephew's joke, and—

P. S.—They had Tommy's funeral next day. The inscription on his tombstone reads: "Tommy—Dide of Ague."

One on the Magistrate.

(By Wheeler McKenna, Pennsylvania.)

It's quite as hard as ever to get ahead of Pat. This was proved the other day during a trial in an English court room, an Irish witness being examined as to his knowledge of a shooting affair.

"Did you see the shot fired?" the magistrate asked, when Pat had been sworn.

"No, sorr. I only heard it," was the evasive answer

"That evidence is not satisfactory," replied the magistrate, sternly. "Stand down!"

The witness proceeded to leave the box, and directly his back was turned he laughed derisively. The magistrate, indignant at the contempt of court, called him back, and asked him how he dared to laugh in court.

"Did ye see me laugh, your honor?" queried the offender.

"No, sir; but I heard you," was the irate answer.

"That evidence is not satisfactory," said Pat, quietly, but with a twinkle in his eye.

And this time everybody laughed—even the magistrate.

David Harum's Trade.

(By C. Hoffman, Pennsylvania.)

The gentleman known as David Harum stopped the deacon on the road.

"Deacon," said David, "I'll give you a dollar and my sorrel mare fer that black colt you're drivin'."

"Done," said the deacon. The horses were unhitched, and soon David sat behind the black colt and the deacon was in possession of David's sorrel.

"Where's the dollar, David?" he asked.

"I paid you," answered David. "Didn't I give you four quarters?"

"When?" asked the deacon.

"Why, ain't there four quarters in the hoss?" asked David.

The deacon shook his fist furiously and muttered something that sounded like, "I'll have the law on ye fer this, Dave Harum," but David only grinned good-naturedly and drove on.

Sister's Little Brother.

(By Robert Stafford, Chicago, Ill.)

"Sis will be down in a minute," said her little brother.

"I'm so glad!" replied Mr. De Trop. "She was not at home the first time I called."

"Oh, yes, she was, but she wouldn't come down."

"How do you know she'll come down this time?"

"'Cause I told her it was another fellow."

A Big Trade in Salt Water.

(By W. D. Griffin, Georgia.)

Once upon a time there lived in Chicago an old, ignorant farmer, who was subject to bad cases of rheumatism. He went to a doctor one day for treatment. The doctor told him to take salt water baths. Now, as there was no salt water around, he started for New York, with a ten-gallon can. Arriving at New York, he went to a hotel and registered.

After staying a day in New York and seeing the sights, he went to Coney Island. He went out on the beach, and as luck would have it, the tide was full. Out on the beach stood a sport looking at the sea as if he owned it.

The ignorant farmer, seeing the man, goes up to him and says:

"Mister, do you own this water?"

Now, the sport, seeing that the farmer was ignorant,

thought that he would have some fun with him, so he replied:

"I do. What can I do for you?"

The farmer replied:

"I wants ten gallons of this salt water."

The sport told him to help himself. The farmer got his water and went back home, where he washed in his salt water every day. By and by it gave out, so he goes back to New York for some more of it. He goes back down to Coney Island, and, as luck would have it, there stood the same sport. Everything looked the same as it did before, except that the tide was out. The old farmer looked first at the sea and then at the sport.

Finally, walking up to the sport, he said:

"By gum, mister, you have sold a heap of water since I was here."

How the Lawyer Got Fooled.

(By Cleon Lloyd, New Hampshire.)

Bill Smith, who was arrested for stealing a horse, went to see a lawyer about it. The lawyer told him that he could fix that all right. He said:

"When you go into court you just say 'bah!' to every question they ask you."

So he did just as he was directed, and the judge called him foolish and let him go. Next day the lawyer went after his pay, but when he asked him for it the fellow just said "bah!" and the lawyer could not get his pay.

His First Bath.

(By Joseph Greenan, Buffalo, N. Y.)

Two Hebrews were strolling along the creek the other day, when they decided to take a bath. On beholding each other in the water one shouted:

"Oh, Abey, how dirty you are!"

"Vell," answered Abey, "I am three years older than you, no wonder!"

PUZZLE DEPARTMENT.

Answers to Last Week's Puzzles.

No. 1.—The bridge of one's nose.

No. 2.—I understand you undertook to overthrow my undertaking.

No. 3.—

N	S
NOT	MAN
NONES	MAGI C
NONPLUS	AGIT AL
TELLS	NITER
SUS	CAR
S	L
MUG	CAB
MONAD	CATER
SUNDIAL	LATER AL
GAILY	BERRY
DAY	RAY
L	L

Stamp and Coin Department.

Each week, in this department, you will find special articles about stamps and coins. We also give an opportunity to our readers to make exchanges of coins, as well as stamps, through this department free of cost, and we will answer, in a special column, any questions our readers would like to ask on these subjects. Address all communications to the "Stamp and Coin Department."

Stories About Stamps.

Some years ago a well-known collector got wind of a whole pillowcase full of real old rarities that might be had for the cheek of asking. Now, an enthusiastic stamp collector knows no bounds when a *bona fide* rarity may be had cheap, and when it may be had for the asking he does not stand upon ceremony.

The possessor of the pillowcase of desirables was quite unknown to the collector, and the news of the treasure came to him quite accidentally.

Said a friend to him one day, "I say, old chappie, you're afflicted still in the stamp direction, are you not?"

"Rather," was the emphatic reply. "What of that?"

"Well, my sister is staying with an old lady who, being over eighty years of age, has conceived the idea that it is time for her to put her house in order in readiness for her anticipated departure to a better country, and Fan is helping her to go through her papers. Among the papers that turned up in the sorting over was a pillowcase stuffed with old stamps. She told Fan to burn the lot, as they were of no use, but Fan thought it was a pity to destroy them, as they might do to amuse her little nieces. So the pillowcase has been put aside for the time, and Fan talks of bringing it home for the kids. The old lady's sons were among the first settlers in Sydney, and, as she had a habit of cutting off the stamps from all her letters, and as her sons were her chief correspondents, it occurred to me that you might like to have a look through the lot and pick out some for yourself."

"First settlers in Sydney! Great Scott! My boy, there may be scores of Sydney Views in the lot."

"Sydney Views? No, there are no pictures; only old postage stamps."

"I don't mean pictures of Sydney. What we call 'Sydney Views' are the rare first stamps issued by New South Wales."

"Oh, I see. I expect there is scarcely anything else but old New South Wales stamps, if they are of any use."

"Any use, my dear fellow! They may be worth a little fortune. Let us have them up at the earliest moment."

Ways and means were discussed, shares were arranged in the treasure trove, and a lady friend returning from the old lady's neighborhood was to be asked to call and bring away the pillowcase. It was agreed that matters could not wait the return of the sister. The sister was written to in a cautious and guarded manner, and the

lady friend was commissioned to call for the parcel. In due time it arrived in London, and was met at the terminus and carried home in a state of great excitement. There were visions of months of sales, of gold in plenty, and of many a quiet spree together.

When that valuable parcel was opened and spread out on the floor, thousands of stamps were disclosed to view, but every stamp there was of the commonest red penny English persuasion! There was not a foreign or colonial stamp of any sort in the whole lot! The collector and his friend were a day after the fair. Someone else had picked over the pillowcase and annexed the Sydney Views.

CORRESPONDENCE.

C. N.—A good half cent of 1800 is worth 50 cents.

O. I.—An 1858 half dime, unless fine, hardly commands a premium.

E. N.—A fine 3 cent piece of 1853 sells at 15 cents. See answer to James Marsh.

S. P.—An 1852 dime and 1830 cent, if in good condition, are worth 15 cents each.

M. D.—The cent of 1816, unless good, is worth only face value; 2,820,982 were issued.

O. D.—Only the eagle cent of 1856 commands a premium. The 1857 and 1858 are common.

S. B.—The catalogue value of your stamps postally used is \$3.65. They sell at about 50 per cent discount from catalogue.

W. N.—The Paris Exposition "stamps" are not stamps at all, but merely labels, and have absolutely no value from a philatelic standpoint.

R. F.—Nearly all of the 1898 revenues have been found "part perforate," and a few values have been found imperforate. In unsevered pairs or blocks they should bring quite a premium over face.

D. E.—All of the stamps you mention are very common with the exception of the 2-cent blue playing cards, which is catalogued at 25 cents, and the 1 1-4 Fletcher & Marchand, which are worth about 5 cents apiece.

B. E. L.—The 8 pence yellow New South Wales is worth about 30 cents. This stamp is watermarked a crown and "N. S. W." and must not be confused with the 8 pence orange of the same design, which is found unwatermarked or watermarked "8," and is much more rare.

NEW PRIZE CONTEST.

"It is to Laugh!"

What is the funniest story you ever heard, boys? What's the latest joke? Do you know any good ones? If you do, here is a chance for you to win some dandy prizes.

We are going to give away these Prizes to the boys who send us the Funniest Stories or the Best Jokes.

The Three Boys Who Send Us the Funniest Stories

will each receive a first-class, up-to-date Banjo. These banjos are beautiful instruments and are warranted in every particular. They have 11-inch calf heads, walnut necks, and veneered finger boards, with celluloid inlaid position dots, raised frets, twenty-four nickel brackets and wired edge. These instruments can be easily mastered, and every boy should jump at the opportunity to win one.

The Five Boys Who Send Us the Next Funniest Stories

will each receive a complete Magic Trick Outfit, including the Magician's Mill, the Columbus Egg, the Enchanted Money Box, the Magician's Whip, the Enchanted Rose, the Ghostly Finger, the Magic Box, the Great Transformer, the Phantom Ring, the Magic Dice, and the Fire Eater. Besides all the magic tricks, the outfit includes a private instruction book for the use of the operator.

The Ten Boys Who Send Us the Next Funniest Stories

will each receive a pair of heavy Military Regulation Leggings, just the thing for winter wear while coasting, or skating, or for tramping the snow. Warm and durable. Made of extra heavy brown canvas, with four straps.

Send in your stories at once, boys. All the best ones will be published on another page. Watch for them! Some of the funniest stories, jolliest jokes and side-splitting grinds ever heard are going to appear there.

This contest will close February 1. Remember, whether your story wins a prize or not, it stands a good chance of being published, together with your name.

To become a contestant for these prizes, you must cut out the Prize Contest Coupon, printed herewith; fill it out properly, and mail it to NICK CARTER WEEKLY, care of Street & Smith, 238 William St., New York City, together with your story. No story will be considered that does not have this coupon accompanying it.

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Name.....

City or Town.....

State.....

Title of Story

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Not Gold Filled Watches,

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